

Galatians 4:1-11

“Freedom to Inherit”

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Thesis: As a parent, it brings me great joy and happiness when our sons are living our family values. Yet, their identity, and my love is not conditioned upon their performance. Similarly, my identity as God’s child, and His love is not conditioned upon performance. If God has adopted us into His family, our inheritance is amazing and sure. Let’s discover it together...

Subject: God’s adoption

Object: Discover your inheritance

Context: Once you have believed and received Christ, you are God’s child and heirs of the promised blessings [3:29].

1. Works based religion is enslavement [1-3]

Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all [1]. Imagine that a wealthy father in the Greco-Roman world planned to give his son his entire inheritance. The child is destined to great wealth and authority, but until he reaches the age of maturity he is under authority like a servant. In the ancient world, the child was *under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father* [2]. Guardians manage people and stewards manage property [3:23]. Thus, the heir and the inheritance were under full authority until the child came of age. In Judaism, a child became a son or daughter of the law/covenant at age twelve or thirteen (*Bat* or *Bar Mitzvah*). In contrast, for the Greeks or Romans, the father determined the time, generally by age eighteen.

Similarly, all peoples, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) are born into *bondage* [3].

Performance based religion is bondage, because it conditions your relationship with God on your performance. We are enslaved to *the elements of the world* [3], which relates to the idea of appeasing deity by your performance of good works. It is the most basic or elemental religious concept that suggests that a person will go to heaven because of their good deeds or that they're a

good person. A similar notion is karma or the idea in Hinduism and Buddhism that the sum of a person's actions determines their future fate. Similarly, in ritual Judaism, it is the view that the way to be right with God is based on your performance of the Mosaic Law [5, 10].

2. Grace based relationship is freedom [4-7]

⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

When the fullness of the time had come [4] refers to God's perfect time schedule. In Daniel chapter nine, God foretold the day that Messiah would make His entry into Jerusalem [Dan. 9:23-27]. God's timing in sending the Messiah was planned and perfect: there was the Pax Romana, or peace in the Roman Empire, there was a common language (Koine Greek), and there was a Jewish expectation of the Messianic Deliverer. *God sent forth His Son, born of a woman* [4] speaks of the Incarnation and the humanity of Jesus [Gen. 3:15]. Christ came *to redeem those who were under the law* [5].

Redemption is the action of saving from sin, error or greed; and involves gaining possession in

exchange of payment. Throughout the Roman Empire, one-half of the population were slaves, and the concept of redeeming from the slave market was very familiar. To redeem, you have to be able and willing to pay. Jesus redeems humanity at the cross, as He gave His life to save ours [Mk. 10:44-45].

When you receive Christ, you are set-free from the penalty of sin, and the elements of the world *that we might receive the adoption as sons* [5]. Adoption in the Roman Empire was different than our typical cultural idea; and often involved adults who were given status as adult sons who were not a natural child. Once adopted, all rights and benefits were given as an heir. We are sons of God through faith in Jesus [Gal.3:26].

Adoption results in a changed identity. All of humanity has God as Creator, but only those who have received Christ are God's children. *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"* [6]. As God's child, you've received a spiritual birth and God's Spirit dwells in you so that your relationship with God is personal and characterized by love.

The Aramaic *Abba* has the English idea of Papa

or Daddy. The intimacy of the idea is revealed by Jesus' use of the term when He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane shortly before the cross [Mk. 14:36].

Sons and daughters relate to God as Daddy, and are motivated by love and new identity. There is a sense of wonder about this new identity, as you try to understand the values, and assimilate into the family. It takes time to adjust, trust, and become familiar with your adopted family. What motivates is not fear of punishment, or being rejected by God, but God's grace.

Your inheritance is first and foremost God Himself [7, Rom. 8:15-17, 1 Pet. 1:3-5].

An adopted son has a changed hope and future. *Through Christ, you are an heir of God* [7].

3. Do you want to relate to God by grace or works [8-11]?

⁸ But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Can you earn God's inheritance or do you receive it as a gift?

Prior to Christ, they *served those which by nature are not gods* [8], In essence, all belief systems and religions, other than biblical Christianity, are performance based. They are false gospels, that direct

worship to a false god, or misrepresent the true and living God. Paul was concerned that after knowing the truth of the gospel of grace, and after knowing the true God and experiencing relationship with Him, they were returning to performance based religion:

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage [9]. They began to observe the Sabbath and religious feasts per the Mosaic Law as a means to be right with God, *You observe days and months and seasons and years [10].* Understanding the Jewish feasts, and how they point to Jesus and His work of redemption, and celebrating the feasts in remembrance of Jesus can be a beautiful experience but it won't make you right with God apart from yielding to Jesus. Similarly, Jesus followers are to observe a Sabbath, a day to worship God, contemplate him, pray, praise, learn of Him and from Him. In the NT, you can make your Sabbath day any day [Col. 2:16-17]. Thus, you are not more spiritual or righteous by observing the Sabbath from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown.

Ritual and good works help us to remember what Jesus did, and reflect who He is, but are not the basis of being right with God.

Paul was concerned for their spiritual condition after he had worked to exhaustion to see them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, *I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain [11].*

Paul's compassion and concern for their spiritual well-being is evident. He didn't want them to

neglect God's grace and what Jesus had done in redeeming them for enslavement to works based religion.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. In what way have you discovered that trying to be right with God by religious performance is a heavy burden (bondage)?

Q2. What if someone objected that relating to God by grace promotes sin. How would you respond? In other words, how does God's grace motivate you to obey?

Q3. When you consider the idea of relating to God as Papa or Daddy what thoughts or feelings come to mind?

Q4. What are some benefits of religious ritual(s), and good works such as spiritual disciplines including, but not limited to: Bible learning, prayer, worshipping with a community of faith, tithing, serving, sharing your faith, and evangelism?

Digging Deeper

1. Read Rom. 8:15-17, and 1 Pet. 1:3-5. What did you discover about your inheritance in Christ?

2. Here is an interesting article on your inheritance in Christ <https://www.gotquestions.org/inheritance-in-Christ.html>.